

Pet pick-up

Miss Molly's Pet Taxi will transport your furry friends to and from appointments

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Old Glory flies again

A group of citizens has banded together to keep Medford in flags during patriotic holidays

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SATURDAY

July 28,
2007

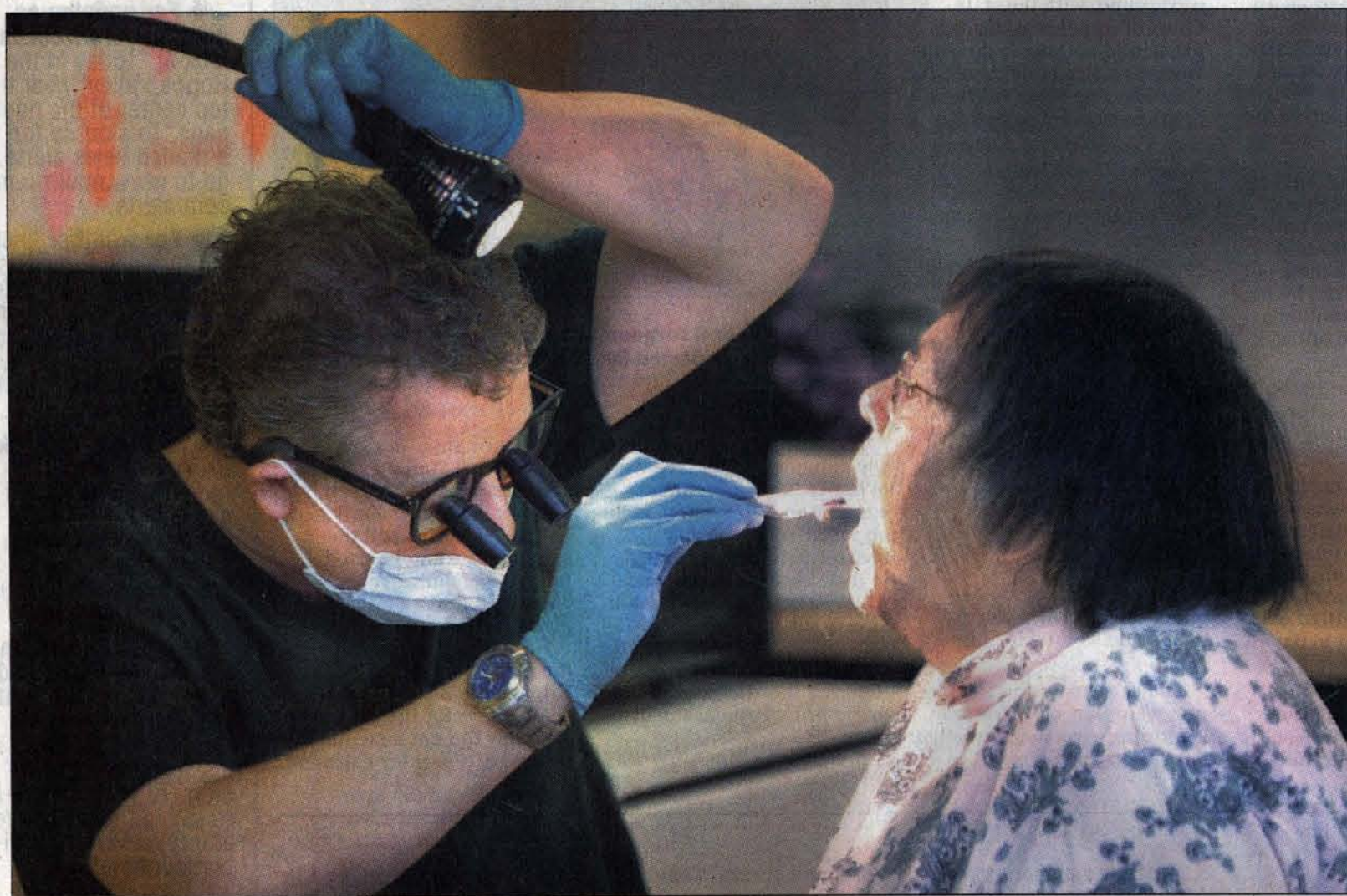
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JACKSON COUNTY, OREGON

SOUTHERN OREGON'S NEWS SOURCE

OPEN WIDE AND SAY 'AHH'



Mail Tribune / Bob Pennell

Jacksonville dentist Dr. Rex Miller checks out Janet Reed during a free clinic at the St. Vincent de Paul social service center.

Free dental clinics are a blessing for those without health insurance

By SARAH LEMON
Mail Tribune

Intending to savor an apple but biting down on her own rotten tooth, Janet Reed knew it was time to see a dentist.

Years had passed since the 71-year-old Medford resident had been in a dentist's chair because she can't afford to pay for treatment up front. A free Friday dental clinic — the first of many planned at St. Vincent de Paul — gave Reed the chance for a check-up.

"Take 'em all out 'cause I'm gonna get false teeth," Reed told dentist Rex Miller. Reed already had lost 15 teeth, Miller noted,

cautioning her that lower dentures would be frustrating. In the end, he recommended pulling a few teeth.

"I just want to get this done and get well," Reed said, adding that diabetes was contributing to the ruin of her teeth. The sharp fragments remaining cut her tongue, she said.

Reed's teeth weren't the worst Miller saw Friday. The Jacksonville dentist prescribed antibiotics for oral infection, referring the three worst cases to Medford dentist Robert Stebbins, who has volunteered his services following every clinic, said Kathy Morgan, vice president of St. Vincent's community relations. The nonprofit organization plans

to hold free clinics every month to six weeks at its new Medford homeless shelter, Morgan said.

"The need is so tremendous," she said. "These people have not seen a dentist for 30 years."

Although many of Friday's patients are employed, they can't afford insurance, Morgan said. In addition to operating a homeless shelter, St. Vincent serves thousands of free meals and assists the "working poor" with groceries and rent and utility subsidies.

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Aah

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Sue Sulester, 46, heard about Friday's clinic while dining at St. Vincent. The Medford resident said she makes about \$10 per hour cleaning houses but can barely pay her bills, much less insurance.

"No insurance," Sulester said, chewing a doughnut.

"Try to get in. A lot of dentists won't let you make payments anymore."

Some local dentists have held one-day free clinics in the past, Miller said. Friday's clinic, he added, is the first long-term local attempt at improving oral health among the uninsured and reducing emergency-room visits for dental emergencies.

"It's one of the things I know the hospitals complain about," Miller said. "We're trying to just lighten the load a bit."

The emergency room at Providence Medford Medical Center sees at least one patient daily with an urgent dental condition, said community relations coordinator Lauren Van Sickle.

St. Vincent also plans to promote good dental hygiene with monthly classes in cooperation with La Clinica del Valle, which provided dental assistants for Friday's screening, Morgan said. Another 11 patients will be referred for treatment when Northwest Medical Teams'

mobile dental clinic comes to town on Sept. 14, Morgan said.

Bringing the motor coach outfitted with dental equipment to Medford will cost about \$600, Morgan said. An association of Northwest dental hygienists has pledged help with the cost, said Morgan. St. Vincent incurs no other cost to hold its dental clinics, she added.

While St. Vincent originally planned to hold dental-sealant clinics for children, it became apparent that adults have far more pressing dental needs, Morgan said. La Clinica and Community Health Center each operate school-based dental clinics

every year. However, low-income children who can't obtain services elsewhere are welcome at St. Vincent clinics, Morgan said.

St. Vincent raised nearly \$3 million over three years to remodel its St. Anthony Family Emergency Shelter and to build a

new warehouse and thrift store at the North Pacific Highway property. For more information about its dental clinics, call 772-3828 between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. weekdays.

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